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JOSEPH C. HARSCH

Spying for Israel

IF you are still wondering why Israel was spying in Washington, here is the explanation.

The United States supplies weapons of many varieties to several Arab countries. The US is the main supplier to Egypt; also to Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The small Arab sheikhdoms along the Gulf also look to Washington for weapons.

Few secrets are kept from Israel in Washington, but an effort is made to play fair with the Arabs and not tell Israel about every plane, gun, and bullet that goes to some Arab country. Since most Arab countries are technically at war with Israel and since the US is technically neutral between the Arabs and Israel, it tries to be fair to both in such matters.

Washington does not tell the Arabs everything it does for Israel. Proper international behavior requires that in turn it play fair with the Arabs and not tell Israel everything it knows about the doings of the Arab countries.

While the US has a special relationship with Israel, the US is not formally or officially allied with Israel. True, the word ally is often applied to Israel, even in speeches and public statements by high officials, including the president.

But there is no treaty binding the US and Israel together, as there is one binding the US with the NATO allies and Japan.

The special relationship is based not on a treaty but on a series of presidential and lower-level statements, agreements, and commitments that bind the individuals who make them, but not the continuing government or the next generation of officials.

Only a formal treaty ratified by a two-thirds vote of the Senate is binding on subsequent governments.

Hence there is one area of information in Washington which in theory is closed to overt Israel intelligence, but which is of special interest to Israel. Israel cannot have access to that particular type of information without the US being unfair to the friendly Arab countries.

If the Arabs knew that Washington was passing along full information about its dealings with them to Israel, they would have one more reason to break off their relations with the US and turn to other countries, even to Moscow, for their weapons and other forms of aid.

Hence a sincere effort is made in some sections of the federal bureaucracy in Washington to deny to Israel some information about the friendly Arab countries. And that automatically creates a special target for Israeli intelligence.

Most of official Washington is open to Israel. Israeli intelligence officers have long been exchanging information with their US opposite numbers. The covert side of the CIA is said to have easy personal relations with Mossad, the Israeli secret service.

High US officials say they take it for granted in their daily operations that anything which would interest Israel gets from State Department or National Security Council meetings to the Israeli Embassy in not more than two hours.

For public relations purposes it has been stated that the US and Israel have an agreement not to spy on each other. So far as the US is concerned this seems to have been largely observed before the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June of 1982. No one will say officially that it broke down at that time, but there is reason to believe that it did.

Washington feels less need for background information from Israel now, with Shimon Peres as prime minister, and a restoration of relative frankness in relations between the two countries. But it was deemed necessary in the Menachem Begin period, when the Israel government paid little if any heed to Washington's wishes.

The US exchanges intelligence information more freely and completely with its two closest allies, Britain and Canada, than with others. There is little if any need for paid spying in this three-cornered relationship. But a certain amount of clandestine spying probably goes on in US relations with most other countries.